

# VolunteerVoice

*"The Voice of the Earth Team"*

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

Second Quarter 2010

## ***Congratulations 2009 National Earth Team Award Winners!***

National Earth Team Volunteer Service Award - **Chief's Cup Kansas**

National NACD/NRCS Earth Team Award - **Tri-Basin Natural Resources District, Holdrege, Nebraska**

National RC&D/NRCS Earth Team Award - **Coosa Valley RC&D, Oxford, Alabama**

National Earth Team Chief's Field Award - **Salem Field Service Center, Salem, Arkansas**

National Earth Team Individual Volunteer Award - **Amy Plavak, Oregon**

Regional Winner - **Larry Fieser, Kansas**

Regional Winner - **Donna Murray, New York**

National Earth Team Group Volunteer Award - **Fast Food Farm, Louisiana**

Regional Winner - **Montgomery County Water Festival, Alabama**

Regional Winner - **Pierce Stream Team, Washington**

National Earth Team NRCS Employee Award - **Mary Giles, Missouri**

Regional Winner - **Phillip Dixon, Tennessee**

Regional Winner - **Mark Monsen, Utah**

National Volunteer Coordinator Award - **Joanna Pope, Nebraska**

Regional Winner - **Natalie Freeman, Tennessee**

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# Happy Anniversaries!

*Submitted by Michele Eginoire, National Volunteer Coordinator*

The USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service has a lot to celebrate in 2010. It is the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the agency's founding and it is the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Earth Team, NRCS' volunteer program in service to conservation. Both anniversaries reflect the agency's long standing commitment to the nation's natural resources and the people who volunteer on behalf of that commitment.

NRCS Chief Dave White recently gave a keynote address to members of the National Association of Conservation Districts. NACD is made up of locally elected conservation leaders who exemplify the best of Earth Team—they volunteer their service to benefit others and the environment. Chief White told the group, "Earth Team is celebrating its 25th anniversary. On the one hand, it



Michele Eginoire

seems like Earth Team has always been part of our conservation family. On the other, having been around when it was established, I can't believe our incredible volunteers have already stacked up a quarter-century's worth of contribution to the nation."

In 2009, the Earth Team Volunteer Program concluded another successful year with more than 36,000 volunteers providing nearly 693,000 hours of service. Volunteers provided nearly 330 staff years' worth of service valued at \$14 million and they continue to make a critical contribution to the agency now as they have throughout Earth Team's quarter-century of service.

Earth Team members have served our country for 25 years. Since its founding, over a half million people had signed up as Earth Team volunteers. They have donated 15.5 million hours promoting and producing conservation prac-

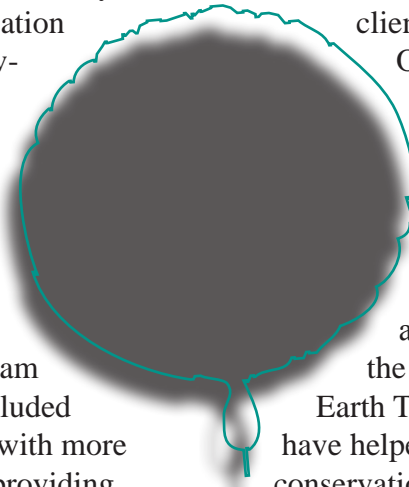
tices for NRCS customers, clients and partners.

Our volunteers have solved problems. They have helped us stretch tight budgets and be more effective and efficient. In

the past 25 years,

Earth Team volunteers have helped us put a lot of conservation on the ground.

This issue of the Volunteer Voice lists the 2009 Earth Team national award winners. We celebrate their accomplishments and the accomplishments of every Earth Team member. If you are an Earth Team member or a staff member that works with volunteers, we celebrate you! Thank you for your service to conservation. Thank you for your help in improving the environment and helping us help the land.



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## The Volunteer Voice

*Articles and photographs for publication should be e-mailed, via your State Volunteer Coordinator, to [dick.tremain@ia.usda.gov](mailto:dick.tremain@ia.usda.gov). Please remember to include photographs to illustrate the article. High resolution JPEG images are preferred.*

*Submittal deadlines for 2010 editions of the VolunteerVoice are listed below:*

- Summer--Distribution in June 2010. Deadline to submit: 5/17/10
- Fall--Distribution in September 2010. Deadline to submit: 8/16/10
- Winter--Distribution in December 2010. Deadline to submit: 11/15/10

*For information about the Earth Team and the Volunteer Voice, go to [www.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov), call 1-888-LANDCARE, or your local Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office listed in the telephone directory under "U.S. Government, U.S. Department of Agriculture."*

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# Earth Team Tracking System

The new Earth Team Volunteer Tracking system came on-line in FY09. It identifies tasks volunteers are performing. Below is a breakdown of how Earth Team volunteers assist NRCS.

Percentage of Hours	Activity
41%	Conservation Planning and Technical Assistance
29%	Outreach and Communications
12%	Conservation Implementation
7%	Clerical Services
6%	Divided on a number of activities including Financial Assistance
	Human Capital, Training, NRCS Financial Audit Follow-up
3%	Natural Resource Inventory and Assessment
2%	Organizational Improvement and Management

## National Staff Changes

**Venessa Homewood**, office assistant at the national Earth Team/LANDCARE office in Des Moines, is leaving NRCS. She's accepted a job with the Air Force in San Antonio, Texas, which is closer to her family.

Venessa told Volunteer Voice: I began my NRCS career as an Earth Team volunteer. When I moved to Iowa in 2004, I didn't know anyone and wasn't sure where I wanted to work. I noticed the National Earth Team/LANDCARE office was looking for volunteers, so I decided to give it a try in hopes that they would eventually be hiring. A few weeks after I had began volunteering part time, an opening was announced. I quickly jumped at the chance and was hired!

Looking back, signing up as an Earth Team volunteer was the best thing I could've done. I was skeptical at first, because I needed a job, but patience and hard work paid off. I've been working at the National Earth Team/LANDCARE office since April of 2004 and have loved every minute of it. I've had so many great experiences and met so many great people!

I recently accepted a job with the Air Force in San Antonio, Texas. Becoming a federal employee was never something I would've never imagined for my career path, but it's been an exciting adventure and I wouldn't change a thing. I look forward to continuing my federal career that began by chance as an Earth Team volunteer in Iowa...



Venessa  
Homewood

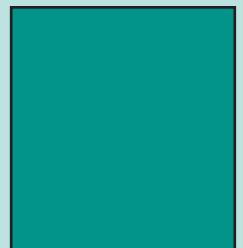
Public Affairs Specialist **Dick Tremain** joins national Earth Team/LANDCARE staff in Des Moines. He will be responsible for marketing the Earth Team and LANDCARE to internal and external audiences and assist national public affairs staff with developing brochures, fact sheets, and manuals.

Dick is a former radio broadcaster and university communications professor who served 27 years in the military as a journalist and public affairs officer in both the Army and Navy. He joined NRCS in 2001 as an urban public affairs specialist. Most recently he served on the Iowa NRCS public affairs staff where he specialized in writing and marketing conservation success stories, media relations and producing radio news releases.

Dick holds a bachelor of business administration/marketing degree from Winona State University and a master of business administration degree from the University of Wisconsin.

"I'm thrilled to be on the Earth Team/LANDCARE team," he said. "This staff is very supportive and professional and our work can help NRCS staff, partners and the public improve conservation practices in every county in the U.S."

He is married to Maureen and they have two children: Richie is an airman aboard USS Enterprise (CVN-65) and Laurie is a college freshman. Dick and Maureen enjoy traveling in the United States and have been to Europe each of the last ten years.



Dick Tremain

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## 2009 Kansas Earth Team Partnership Award Winner

*Submitted by: Jamie Johnson, Area Volunteer Coordinator, Kansas*

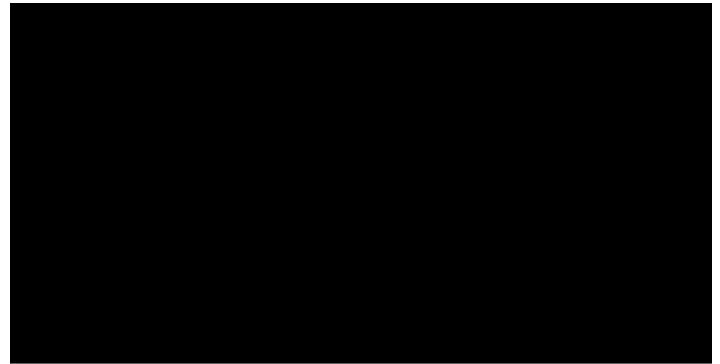
Kingman County Conservation District was the recipient of the 2009 Earth Team Volunteer Partnership Award in Kansas. The district partnered with NRCS and utilized Earth Team volunteers to assist them with carrying out a wide variety of activities such as participating in the organization and execution of their annual meeting, clerical assistance, educational field days, and operation of a newly established recycling center.

Another activity that they utilized volunteers was for their annual Walk in the Woods event held at the Riggs Arboretum in Waterloo, Kan. Walk in the Woods is an outdoor classroom that is held each year for area 5th graders. Volunteers are utilized to carry out the initial site preparation such as the arboretum trail clean up, perform as group leaders, present informational materials, serve lunch, and participate in the clean up.

One of the greatest strides the Kingman County Conservation District and NRCS began as a 2007 recycling initiative for Kingman and surrounding counties. They formed a partnership with several local entities to achieve their local goal of starting a county-wide recycle program. There are a couple of local towns that have a city recycle program that provided service to their citizens, but there was not anything available to the outlying communities or the

rural individuals of the county. The partners formed a steering committee along with interested individuals from the county. The committee is comprised of all volunteers, with Dick Neville, conservation district board member and Pam Stasa, Kingman County Conservation District manager leading the charge.

NRCS and the Kingman County Conservation District has also coordinated an E-waste collection in April 2009. This is yet another example of how Earth Team volunteers were utilized to make an event successful.



State Conservationist Eric Banks; John Meng, and Dick

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## North Carolina Starts Earth Team Garden

*Submitted by: Vera Thomas, Volunteer Coordinator for National Centers*

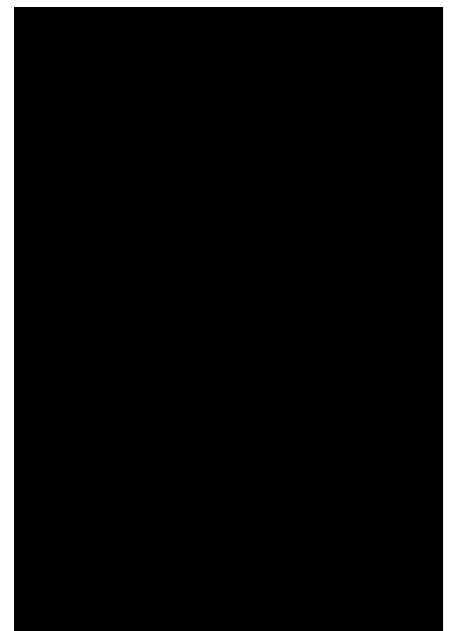
Several staff members from the East Remote Sensing Laboratory (ERSL) in Greensboro, N.C. established a local Community Garden on Gateway's South Campus.

The initiative was conceived and led by ERSL Earth Team Volunteers, who planted, weeded and harvested squash, peppers, tomatoes, watermelons and okra. Unfortunately, the local wildlife took a strong liking to the corn.

Gateway University Research Park provided the plot for the garden and individuals from NC A&T State University prepared the garden plot for planting. Members of the USDA's East National Technology Support Center ("ENTSC") provided guidance during the garden's development.

At harvest ERSL Earth Team volunteers donated nine bags of produce to their area's local urban ministries and church pantries.

Earth Team Volunteers Dan Good (light colored shirt) and Nathan West tend to a community garden in



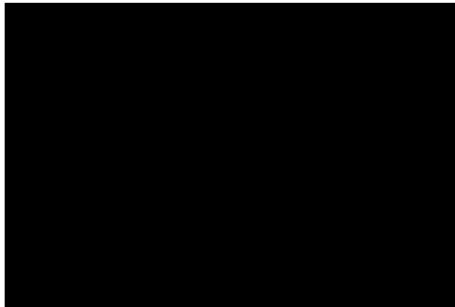
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# Kansas Earth Team Volunteer Apprentice Program

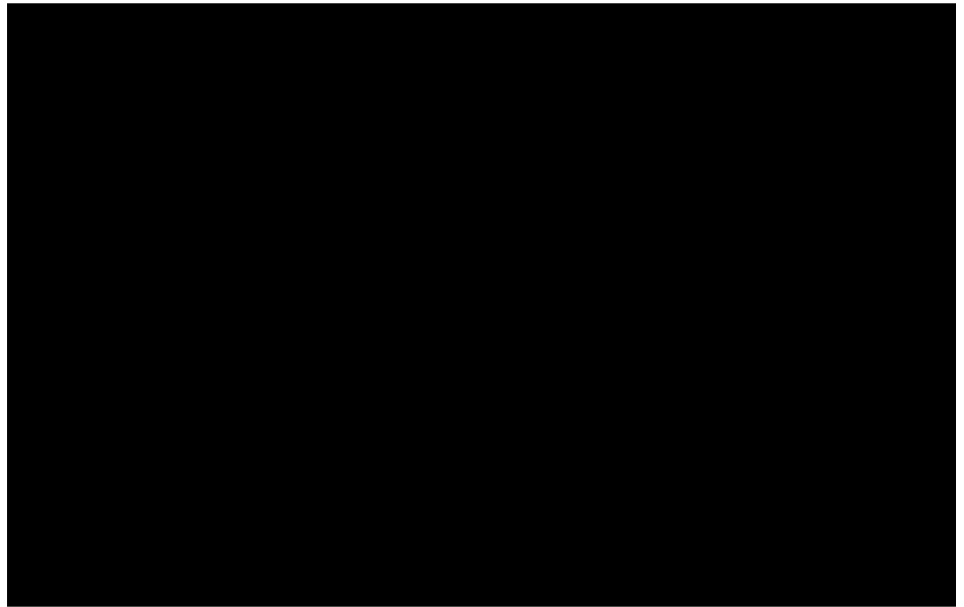
*Submitted by: Jamie Johnson, Area Volunteer Coordinator, Kansas*

Kansas Earth Team participants continue to utilize the Volunteer Apprentice Program to fulfill their desire to obtain experience in various fields pertaining to conservation. The program allows the apprentice to participate in a variety of hands-on learning experiences. These include engineering, surveying, staking terraces and ponds, water quality activities, environmental education, and natural resource camps.

Several students are taking this opportunity to gain hands-on experience with the agency in hopes of future aspirations to be hired on as a fellow NRCS employee. Some of our apprentices are seasonal, working with NRCS only in the summer months, while others work for an entire year. Whether these individuals are long term or short term, they are learning by practical experience under skilled workers.



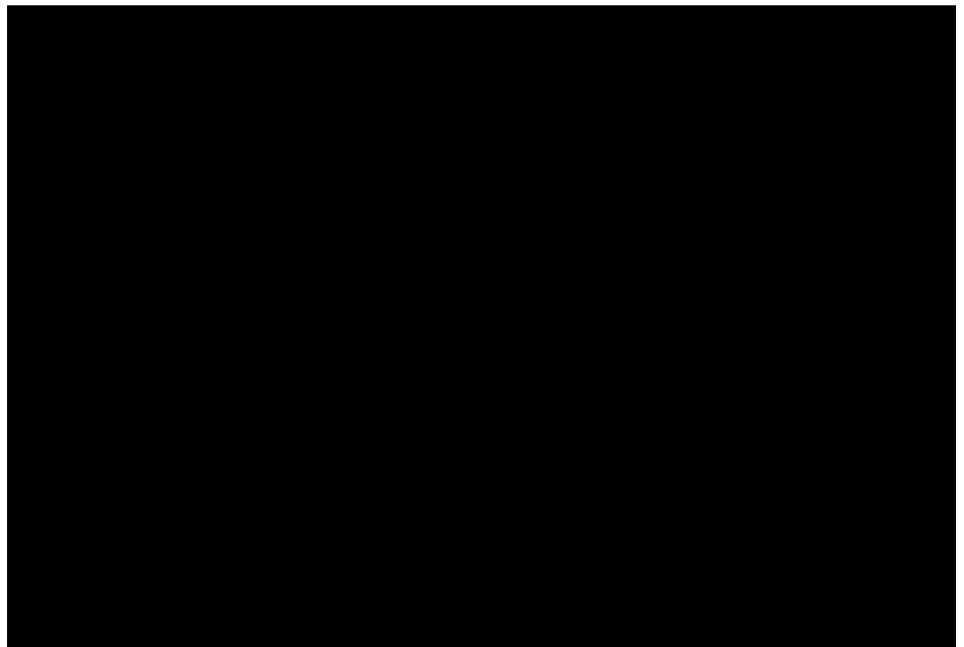
she worked with Baron Shively and



more familiar with NRCS should he

the left, District Conservationist, Mike  
Clover invests some time to train

He is currently attending Fort Hays



J'amie Quick, right, originally signed

assisted with some RC&D activities  
including working with World War

determination with the District  
Conservationist Ron Klein and

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# Volunteer Work Benefits Volunteers

*by Dick Tremain, Public Affairs Specialists, National Earth Team/LANDCARE Staff*

Michele Eginoire, national Earth Team volunteer coordinator, recently appeared with Adam Gross, the Iowa governor's outreach coordinator and volunteer liaison, to promote the benefits of volunteerism to state employees who routinely work with welfare recipients and the unemployed. Eginoire and Gross asked the 100 people attending to promote volunteerism to their clients as a way their clients can improve their lives.

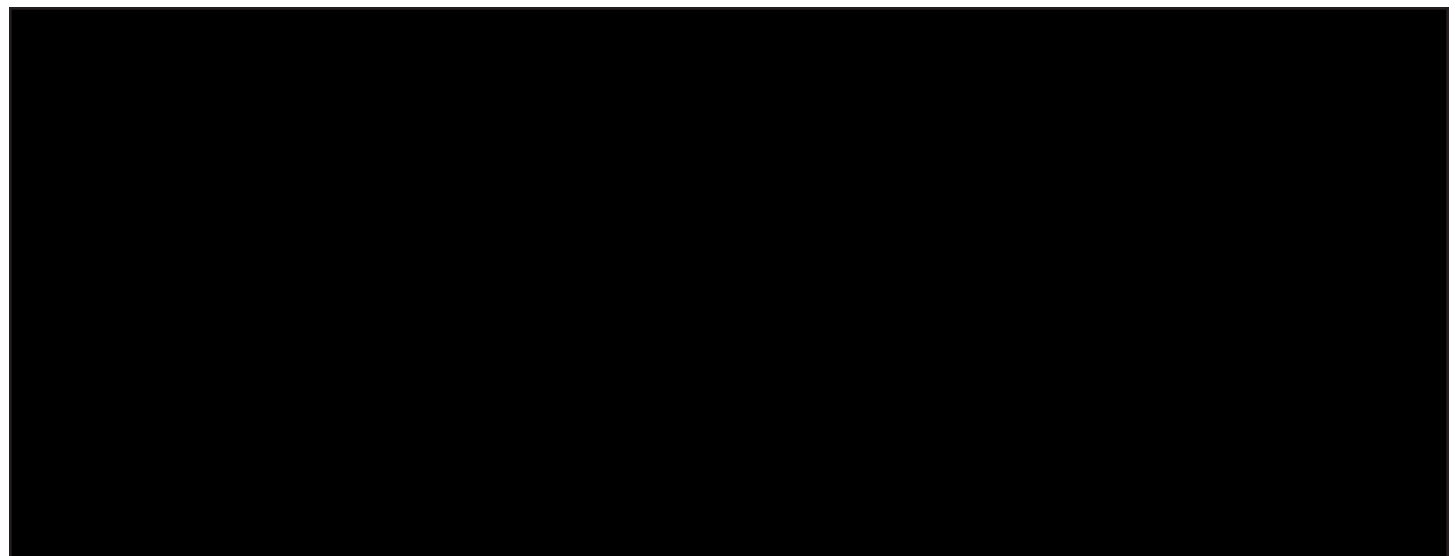
"Volunteering offers many benefits," Eginoire told the audience. "It can improve a resume, help with networking and reduce depression. When people start volunteering, many will say they are working to help others. Over time, many volunteers discover a very surprising truth: they end up getting far more out of volunteering than the people they are helping. That's strange, but true. They discover volunteering really ends up helping the volunteer."

To prove her point, Eginoire conducted an exercise. She broke the state employees into groups and asked them to develop lists of the benefits of volunteering.

The top 29 appear below:

- Looks good on a resume
- Makes you feel like a millionaire
- Make a difference
- Meet new people
- Improving your community
- Making the world better
- Personal growth
- Networking
- Workout
- Alleviate depression and narcissism
- Doing something for someone else
- Balance Karma in the universe
- Sleep better
- Help others have opportunities to succeed
- Exposure to others who volunteer
- It's a reality check because someone is always worse off
- When everyone gives a little it's amazing to see what's accomplished
- Sense of pride and accomplishment
- Keeps you motivated
- Keeps you on schedule
- Give hope to others
- Making lives better for others
- Sharing good fortune
- Getting out of the house
- Build self-esteem
- New friendships
- Nothing like the feeling when you give to others
- Build skills

Eginoire concluded her talk by pointing to the list of benefits her audience created and asking them to promote volunteerism as a way their clients can improve their own lives and better their community, too.



Michele Eginoire, national Earth Team volunteer

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# Kansas District Manager Award Presented

*Submitted by: Loretta Cecil, Area I Volunteer Coordinator, Dodge City Management Unit*

Julie Jones has been the District Manager for the Lakin Service Center for 8 years. In 2009 she was nominated and won the honor of being the District Manager of the Year for the Kansas Earth Team Volunteer Program. This award for district managers is exclusive to Kansas and was developed to honor the contributions of volunteers from our conservation districts.

As District Manager, Julie is involved in two major educational events per year. The two events educate more than 1,600 children with the added benefit of educating their siblings and parents. A large percent of the attending students are Hispanic and from a bilingual background.

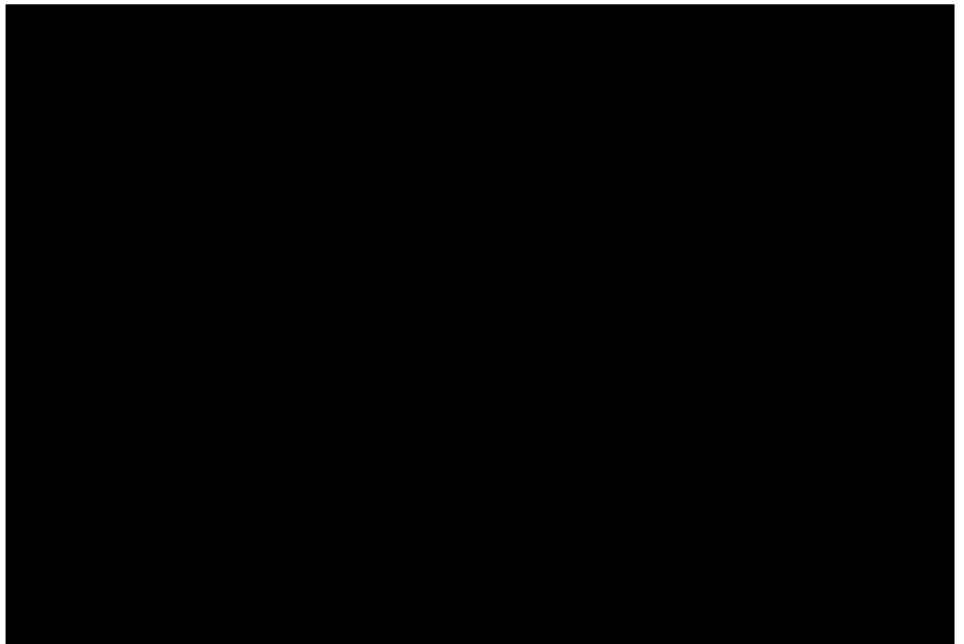
For the past four years, Julie and the District Manager from Hamilton County are the organizers of a Progressive Ag Safety Day.

Julie is also a committee member for a yearly two day Ark River Water Festival. The festival has been held for nine years and educates approximately 1,500 fifth and sixth grade students each year. Volunteers number around 75 and work as class presenters

Julie and committee members are also known as mentors for new offices interested in having their own water festivals and safety days. Staff members from other field offices are welcomed and they come and observe how it is done.

In addition to her District duties, Julie belongs to the local Chamber of Commerce and the Lakin Booster Club. She has volunteered

her time to the Kansas Alliance for Wetland and Streams committee for the 5 years. Her volunteerism extends to her involvement with the local PRIDE Committee and projects such as community parks, planting trees along the highway, development of a walking and biking trail and the development of an information booth for the community.



# NRCS AND DEPARTMENT OF LABOR TEAM UP TO CREATE WORK EXPERIENCES FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS

*By Laurie Fritsch, General Clerk, USDA NRCS, Vermillion, S.D.*

Earth Team offers many advantages to the volunteer, the environment and NRCS. Last year, in South Dakota, it helped stimulate the economy, too. This additional Earth Team benefit was made possible because of a \$2.9 million grant from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) and cooperation between the U. S. Department of Labor (DOL) and South Dakota NRCS .

In early 2009, the South Dakota Department of Labor (SD DOL) received stimulus money to fund a youth employment program. They chose South Dakota NRCS as one of the agencies they wanted to work with. The two agencies quickly drew up plans to hire four young people to work with NRCS and sped up the process by signing up participants as Earth Team volunteers.

NRCS Human Resources Officer Pat Crotty said SD DOL views NRCS as a responsible federal agency who employs a professional workforce of people with highly specialized skills. This is the type of experience students need, Crotty added.

SD DOL Workforce Training Administrator Bill Molseed agrees. "What we were looking for was a meaningful work experience to prepare young people for an occupation or career--not just a paycheck," he said.

"It was a super opportunity for these students to get experience working with conservation professionals," said Lori DePauw, South Dakota Earth Team

coordinator. "And the DOL-NRCS partnership certainly helped permanent employees get help with some of their workload."

Lake County District Conservationist Chuck Lebeda was particularly pleased with the speed in which the two agencies brought students like Abby Stricherz on board. He said it took days to get her at work rather than weeks.

Stricherz, a biology education major at Dakota State University (DSU), Madison, helped the Lake County NRCS field office convert hundreds of aerial photos into digital images. As a result of Stricherz's work, Lebeda says landowners requesting a wetland determination receive will receive quicker responses because a soil conservation technician now has instant access to online images needed to complete the process.

The stimulus money also allowed the NRCS to employ students Korey Kezar, South Dakota State University (SDSU); Carly Dearborn, University of South Dakota (USD); and Renee Lukes, DSU.

Craig Veldkamp did not receive stimulus funds, but the SDSU student said he volunteered at the Brookings office so he could learn about soils and get work experience with NRCS.

The outcome delighted Lebeda. He said, "The DOL-NRCS partnership went extremely well. While it would have been nice to see the program extended, it was a tremendous benefit to us. We were able to have help with our conservation work last summer and

this was a great opportunity for us to get more conservation practices on the land."

**Celebrate  
National  
Volunteer  
Week  
April 18-24, 2010**



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# Tennessee Conservationist Wins Multi-State Award

*By Dimple Geesling, Tennessee state volunteer coordinator*

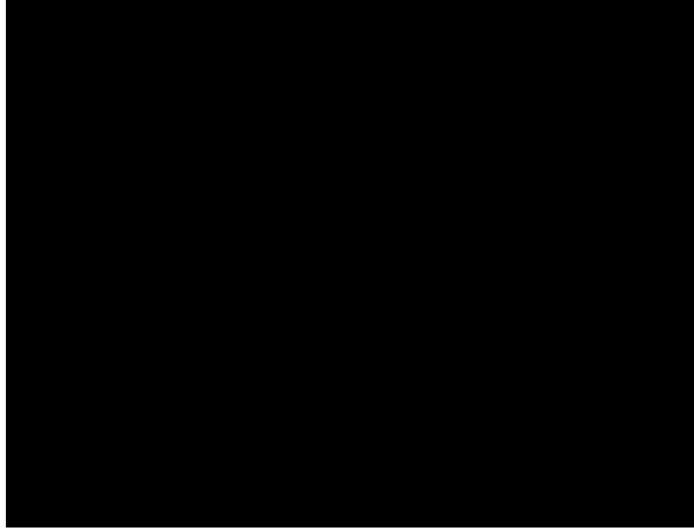
Natalie Freeman, district conservationist in the Dandridge Field Office, was recognized by her state for her leadership in coordinating regional volunteer activities in 26 east Tennessee NRCS offices. The award, called the Tennessee Earth Team Volunteer Coordinator Award, was presented to Freeman at the Tennessee Association of Conservation Districts 66th annual meeting.

Natalie is a native of Putnam County and a graduate of Tennessee Tech University.

She was also the national winner in

this category for the East Region, consisting of twenty five states, including Puerto Rico.

Freeman was cited for effectively training Earth Team leaders and volunteers, promoting the program and leading her Earth Team region by example.



Natalie Freeman holds a Tennessee regional volunteer

Dimple Geesling, Tennessee state volunteer coordinator, says Freeman works with Earth Team members to help NRCS technicians and partners with their conservation work. “In 2009,” Geesling said, “volunteers donated 4,000 hours in Natalie’s area. That’s the equivalent of adding two full-time employees to our roster.”

Geesling says Freeman has a compassion for working with volunteers and it shows. “She is involved in many Earth Team activities. As a volunteer she helps high school students compete in environmental education competitions, she has taught at a three-day conservation camp for fourth graders and she helps in high school soil judging contests,” said Geesling. “Natalie Freeman is making a positive impact in eastern Tennessee.”

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